

HOW TO... Create a table of contents

The longer your Microsoft Word documents are, the harder they are for readers to navigate. A table of contents is the answer, as Rod Lawton shows

A table of contents is a standard fixture in textbooks, academic reference works and business reports. A novel is the only type of published work you can expect your readers to read from beginning to end. Anything else needs a navigational structure, so that readers can see what's in it, take in the important topics first and know where to find facts later on.

In short, a table of contents (ToC) tells you what's in the document and where to find it. There's no excuse for leaving it out, especially when Word makes creating ToCs so easy.

A ToC is a list of headings (and subheadings, as required) with page numbers. You don't have to type them all in manually, because Word can generate them automatically. It does this by finding every instance of a specific text style in the document, then listing them in order, along with the page number on which they occur.

If you've used heading styles systematically in your document, you can generate and update tables of contents in just a couple of minutes. To follow the tutorial exactly as shown here, use the same document – you'll find a copy of it on this month's cover disc.

1 The first and most essential step is to choose a consistent system of heading and subheading styles. Word's Outline mode (View, Outline) is excellent for this, because it provides a hierarchy of headings from 1-9. These headings are listed in the Styles and Formatting Pane even if you're not using Word's Outline mode. Simply use the Heading 1 style for main headings, Heading 2 for secondary headings and so on, as we've done here.

2 When that's done, go back to the start of the document and place the insertion point on a blank line directly below the main title. This is as good a place as any for a table of contents. Then go to the Insert menu and select Reference, Index and Tables. This is the same command you'd use for inserting an index. You need the second tab in the dialog box, Table of Contents. Go to this tab and click OK. Word will generate a table of contents automatically. It won't be quite right yet, but it's easier to understand what needs fixing and why when you can see the default ToC that Word creates.

3 There are two problems with our ToC. The document heading, Managing data in Excel, appears in the contents listing, which we don't want. The other problem is that we set up a whole series of subheadings in our document that don't yet appear in the ToC. We'll start by getting rid of that Managing data in Excel entry. To re-edit a ToC once it's been created, use the Insert, Reference, Index and Tables command again. Now if we click on the Options button in the Table of Contents tab, we can see the problem: Word is using the outline heading styles to generate the ToC. We've used the Heading 1 style for our document title, so that's why it's appearing in the ToC. The secondary headings have been set to the Heading 2 style, so they appear in the ToC beneath it.

4 We need to remove the Heading 1 style from the list of styles included in the ToC. Unfortunately, you can't do this simply by clicking on the 'tick' icon to the left. Instead,

note the 'ToC level' field to the right. By default, this is set so Heading 1 has a ToC level of 1, Heading 2 has a ToC level of 2 and so on. We just delete the '1' in the box next to Heading 1, set the Heading 2 ToC level to 1 and delete the '3' next to Heading 3. Now, our ToC will consist solely of the 'Heading 2' headings in our document.

5 What about our missing subheads? We didn't use one of the outline Heading styles for this, creating instead an ordinary text style that we called Subhead. While Word's ToCs are set up to work automatically with the outline Heading styles, we can still incorporate other styles in the ToC. We simply need to scroll down the list of Available styles, find our Subhead style at the bottom and type a '2' in the ToC Level box to the right. This makes it subordinate to our other headings, which are set to ToC Level 1.

6 When we click the OK button in the Index and Tables dialog box, we'll be prompted to replace the original ToC with this one, which is what we want to do. Now the ToC lists only those headings and subheadings we want it to.

That's fine, but what if we modify or reformat the text later so that it reflows and the page numbers change? ToCs don't update automatically; you have to do this manually. Here, we've changed from A4 paper to A5, so not only is the pagination different, the existing ToC doesn't fit the new page width. To update it, we simply right-click within the ToC, choose Update Field and then the 'Update entire table' option. **CS**

